



Stop messing about on the internet and do something useful with it instead. With a fast connection you can use the many applications Tom Gorham has found online

If you have a fast internet connection and a web browser, you may never need to load another program on your computer ever again. There is now an online equivalent for nearly every application you'll use on your PC, from word processors and spreadsheets to photo editors and backup tools. It doesn't stop there, either: you can build your own personal radio station, create a community on a social networking site,

manage your finances, send and receive email, organise projects, take notes, collaborate with colleagues and access computers remotely, all without having to install a single file on your PC.

Even better, you can do all this for free. We've gone deep into the web to uncover 30 hidden treasures that will revolutionise the way you work, live and play, and we'll show you how to get the most out of them.

Zoho Office Suite

DETAILS www.zoho.com TYPE Office application

Zoho's online Office Suite is one of the most comprehensive online business tools around. While it's not a fully featured alternative to Microsoft Office, it is certainly a worthy replacement for most uses.

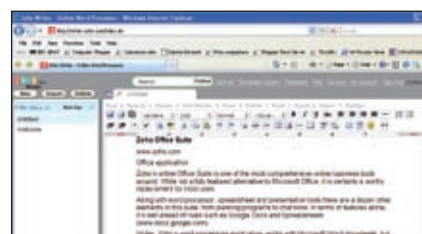
Along with a word processor, spreadsheet and presentation tools, this suite offers a range of elements, from planning programs to chat tools. For features alone, it's well ahead of rivals such as Google Docs & Spreadsheets (www.docs.google.com).

Zoho's word-processing application, Writer, can work with Microsoft Word documents, but its main selling point is that it enables you to share documents online with others. It lacks Office's Track Changes feature, but the ability to store and compare document revisions is a good alternative. There are other

restrictions, such as a limited font selection, but other features, including a word count, are included. There's no lag when typing, as there can be with other web applications.

Zoho Sheet is a polished spreadsheet application that can import and export native Excel files. It has a couple of big advantages over other spreadsheet applications, both offline and online. Multiple people can work on a worksheet simultaneously, and you can synchronise data from websites. Sheet supports live resizing of rows and columns, so any changes you make to them appear onscreen immediately without the need to refresh the browser window. Unlike Google Spreadsheets, Sheet can also import and work with charts.

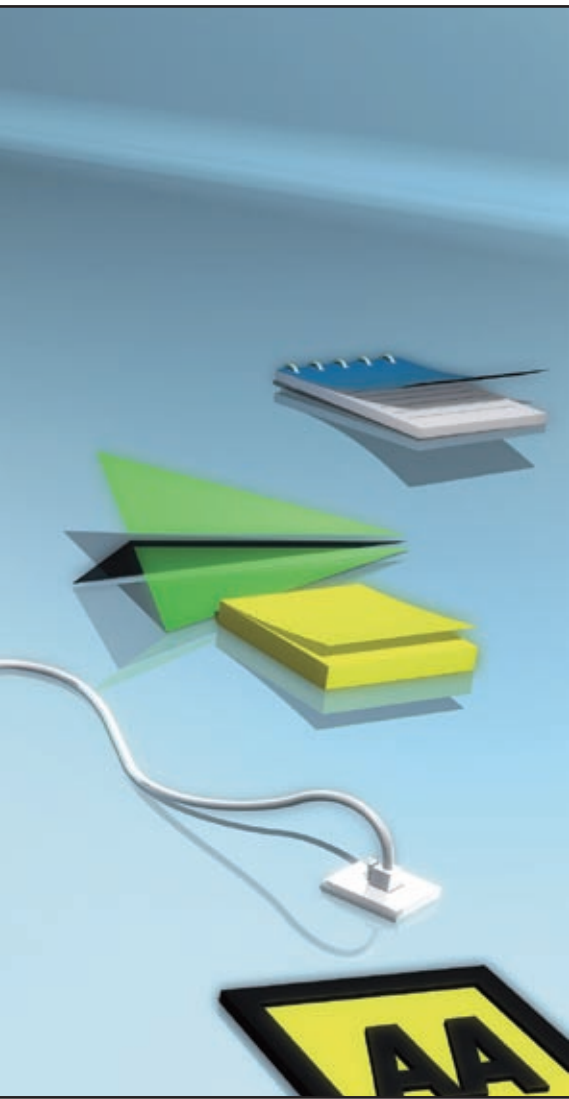
Zoho's presentation tool, Show, lacks PowerPoint's high-end features, such as the



▲ Zoho provides a full office suite online

ability to rehearse timings or record narrations, and can't yet perform transitions. PowerPoint presentations will lose such effects when imported into Zoho Show, but they will run.

The most interesting addition to the suite is Zoho Notebook, a web application that lets you gather different media content on a page, from Writer and Sheet files to songs, images and videos. As with other Zoho elements, two or more people can edit a document at once.



Clipperz

DETAILS www.clipperz.com TYPE Registration utility

Remembering the login details for all your favourite websites is never easy. You can set the sites to remember your login details, but that works only if you use the same PC all the time. If you access the site from another computer, you'll have to enter your username and password again. The future of online registration undoubtedly belongs to services such as Open ID (openid.net), which enables you to use a single username and password to access all your favourite websites.

Until then, there's Clipperz. This web tool securely keeps track of all your registration information. It's not just for online data, either – you could also include the code of your locker at the gym, for example.

The system stores your information on cards. You can add details to these manually, but it's easier and more convenient to use the Bookmarklet application to grab login information as you visit sites. Bookmarklet is a one-click tool that contains a script. You can bookmark the application as you would a web page, and run it by selecting it from your Favorites menu. Do this on any site where you want to save your login details, and copy the code that the Bookmarklet generates into the card details on the Clipperz website.

The card's content is encrypted locally, based on a 128-bit encryption algorithm, before it is uploaded to Clipperz. This isn't a service you would want to use to store login details for sites such as online banking. However, when you think about how many sites you visit that require a username and password, it makes sense to keep all this information in one place where you can access it no matter what computer you are using.

Wesabe

DETAILS www.wesabe.com TYPE Money management

Wesabe is a site where you can view all your online bank statements at a glance. Why would you want to do this online when you have Quicken or Microsoft Money to do the same thing on your desktop? It's all about community interaction. While many financial websites, such as fool.co.uk, offer some form of user contribution, Wesabe takes it further.

To use the system, you download bank and transaction data from the online banks where you hold an account. Current balances appear in the main window, and you can drill down into individual statements.

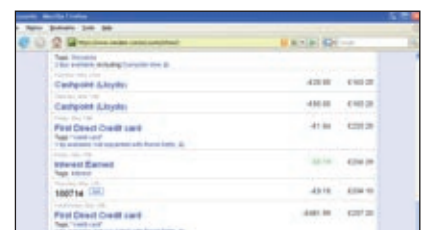
Wesabe's community feel is exemplified by the way you can clean up incoming statements. You can edit a transaction name on your statement, which is especially handy if a transaction has a lengthy name. Wesabe automatically applies this to future statements as you import them. If other members have already edited the same transaction name in their statements, Wesabe will suggest this edited name to you and other members. You can also apply ratings to merchants, which are aggregated with the opinions of other users.

You organise your finances by tagging individual transactions with labels such as 'groceries' or 'going out'. You can add multiple tags (or labels) to a transaction and split a transaction between them by specifying the amount to apply to each tag. For example, if you withdrew £100 from a cashpoint machine and spent £80 of this on groceries and £20 on a lottery ticket, you would add tags in the form of 'groceries:80 lottery:20'. Then, when you searched for your spending on groceries, the £80 would show up, and when you view lottery tags the £20 would appear. You can also use the spending summary to illustrate graphically where your money is going.

The biggest advantage of tags is that Wesabe matches money-saving tips – supplied by other members – according to your tags.

There's an obvious transatlantic feel to Wesabe, but don't let that put you off. It supports UK banks, and you can change the default currency to sterling from a drop-down menu.

The site doesn't link directly to your online bank accounts, so you have to download data manually from your online bank or use a separate desktop application. But Wesabe is smart enough to ignore transactions you've already uploaded. This manual approach has a distinct privacy advantage. Because the only personal data the site captures about you is your sign-up email address, there's no glaring risk of an identity thief emptying your accounts.



▲ Manage your money and learn from others. Wesabe displays user-supplied money-saving tips, which appear next to relevant transactions on your bank statements



ThinkFree Online

DETAILS www.thinkfree.com TYPE Office application

ThinkFree Online is another Office alternative, although it looks and feels more like its desktop equivalent than Zoho does. ThinkFree calls its main window a webtop. From here you access the word processor, spreadsheet and presentation elements, and it shows recently edited documents for quick access.

You can open documents in one of two edit modes. There is a quick edit mode, which loads speedily but lacks most layout tools, and a Java-based Power Edit mode. Power Edit comes with extras, such as access to system fonts and a spellchecker that flags up misspelled words as you type.

The word processor, ThinkFree Write, has a word count tool, and handles drop caps and

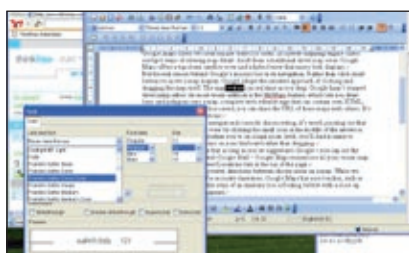
tables. ThinkFree Calc lacks Excel's advanced features such as macro support and pivot tables, but for most tasks it's a good alternative.

The presentation tool, Show, is a clunky but otherwise worthy PowerPoint alternative. Some of PowerPoint's features, such as the ability to embed movies in a presentation, are absent. All three modules will open native Office files.

ThinkFree is another of the new breed of web application that will have you believing you're using a desktop application. The only hint of its online upbringing is when you're in Power Edit mode, where it can take a few seconds to load each module the first time. It's much faster on subsequent visits, though.

One strong feature of ThinkFree, which includes 1GB of web space, is its collaborative tools. You can share documents by email simply by clicking on the Share button at the top of the Edit window. It's also possible to publish documents, assigning them a URL that others can access through their web browser. As with Zoho Office Suite, it is possible for two or more people to edit a document at the same time.

ThinkFree isn't a complete replacement for Office. There's no database module for starters. It's free to use but you have to put up with advertisements. However, you can hide the banner ads when editing documents.



▲ With its live spellchecking and excellent performance, you'd be hard pressed to recognise ThinkFree Online as a web application



Meebo.com

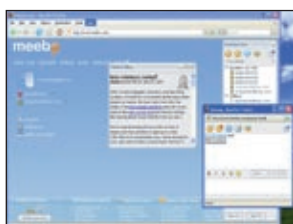
DETAILS www.meebo.com
TYPE Instant messaging

The ability to communicate wherever you are seems to be not so much a bonus as a requirement these days. For those whose chosen medium is instant messaging, meebo is a one-stop web application that makes it easy to keep up with many different instant messaging programs at once.

With meebo you can connect simultaneously to AIM, Yahoo!, MSN, Google Talk, ICQ and Jabber messaging accounts, all through a single web page. Simply enter your screen name and password for each of the chat systems to which you want to connect, and meebo logs you on to each at the click of a single button. It then takes you to a new page that shows you which services you're connected to, grouping all your contacts in a single buddy list.

Meebo is a fine example of how feature-rich web applications can be. When you receive messages, they arrive in their own pop-up windows (if you have disabled pop-ups, they appear instead as draggable windows inside the browser page). Using meebo is also a sneaky way of getting round office restrictions on messaging or fussy corporate firewalls. As long as you can connect to the meebo website, you can use instant messaging, even if the standard firewall ports used by instant messaging applications are blocked.

It is possible to log into multiple accounts without registration, but you have to enter your login name and address for each service individually. This is a good option if you just want a quick text chat with a friend or to check who is online. You can even be invisible, so you can see your contacts but they can't see that you're online. If you register with meebo, though, you need only enter a single meebo name to open all your chosen accounts automatically. You also get the ability to store chat logs.



▲ Use meebo to keep track of all your instant messaging accounts

Netvibes

DETAILS www.netvibes.com TYPE Web portal

Netvibes is a customisable web portal that enables you to collate information from different sources on a single page, which you can then set as your browser's home page. Both Google and Yahoo! have similar offerings, but Netvibes does it better.

A typical Netvibes page is divided into tabs, each of which contains modules that hold a particular type of information. Netvibes has built-in modules for news headlines, weather information, blogs, email accounts and Flickr photos that you can configure. A great timesaver is the web search module, which searches multiple search engines and displays the results in a tiny window.

If you can't find the module you want, you can build your own and even share it with others in the Netvibes ecosystem library (<http://eco.netvibes.com>).



▲ Netvibes collects information from across the web

You add modules to your page by dragging them from Netvibes' sidebar, and arrange them by dragging them into position. You can tailor your page further in the Netvibes' Settings menu by choosing from a clutch of themes that alter the appearance and colour of your home page. Netvibes even lets you upload your own images to use as the background.

Google Mail

DETAILS <http://mail.google.com> TYPE Webmail

When Google Mail launched its free webmail service – to huge media interest – there was some concern about privacy. Google scans email messages in order to target recipients with tailored advertisements.

However, on the plus side you get 2.8GB of storage, and it allows attachments of up to 20MB. Finding messages is easy with Google's built-in search engine. We've used Google Mail for two years and found that downtime is extremely rare.

Its spam filtering is quite effective, and its organisational tools are flexible. Unlike Outlook, Google Mail doesn't organise email into folders. Instead you tag mail with labels. This takes a little



▲ Store up to 2.8GB of email for free with Google Mail

getting used to if you're unfamiliar with tags, as email isn't automatically moved out of the inbox. However, you can set up filters to tag mail as it arrives.

Basecamp

DETAILS www.basecamp.com TYPE Project management

Although it could never be described as fully featured, 37 Signal's Basecamp is a project management application that thrives because it is so easy to use. As it is web-based, there are no concerns about compatibility or location. Simply add the names of your team members and allocate their access rights when you start a project.

Individual project windows display late and upcoming project milestones above a list of completed tasks. You assign each milestone a due date and a person who's responsible for it. If you need to change a milestone's due date, Basecamp will automatically adjust the date of subsequent milestones to take account of the delay.

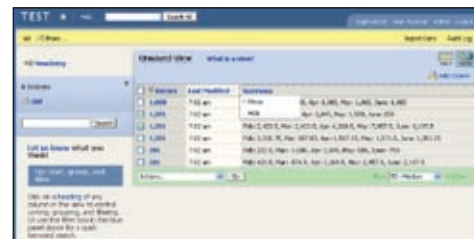
Dabbledb

DETAILS <http://dabbledb.com> TYPE Database application

Dabbledb is an online database application that lets you cut and paste data from databases and Excel spreadsheets to a web page and restructure it completely. You can use Dabbledb to filter data and add relations between fields. It can even grab data from websites at regular intervals.

The application can filter and sort both numerical and text data and display it visually, for example in a calendar or a graph. You can save these views and go back to them later. Most cleverly of all, Dabbledb interprets data, recognising dates in a spreadsheet, for example, and showing them in a calendar view.

The downside to the free version of Dabbledb is that it doesn't have any password protection,



▲ As long as your database is public, Dabbledb is free, and drop-down menus enable you to see your spreadsheet data in a new light

which means your database remains open to public view. But provided you don't want to use it for any particularly sensitive information, it is a powerful and easily accessible tool.



YouTube

DETAILS www.youtube.com TYPE Online video

It has many rivals, but YouTube remains the best video-sharing website. To upload a video, registered users enter basic details, including tags to help viewers find it and privacy settings to restrict who sees it. You then select the video file on your PC. It must be shorter than 10 minutes and no bigger than 100MB. It is also worth making sure the video matches, or doesn't exceed, the resolution of 320x240 used by YouTube.

YouTube converts and hosts the file. The website also allows you to record and upload live video straight from your webcam. YouTube viewers can watch any video made public, using the tags assigned by the creator to find one they might be interested in.



▲ Part of the reason for YouTube's success is its quick search tool and the way you can personalise it through subscriptions to members' videos

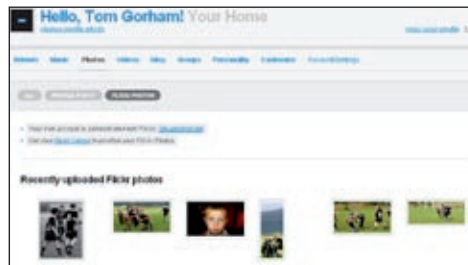
Virb

DETAILS <http://virb.com> TYPE Social networking

The world is hardly short of social networking sites. There's the well-known MySpace (www.myspace.com) and Facebook (www.facebook.com) for a start. However, if you're looking for something a little more grown up, Virb is the website for you.

Virb isn't hampered by adverts. Your topics of interest, such as music, photos, blogging and so on, are easy to access from a simple toolbar. Virb also makes it easy to include data from other websites. If you have a blog elsewhere, for example, you can bring its content into Virb. You can also view Flickr photos.

You can tailor your pages extensively in one of two ways. There's the familiar drag-and-drop style of



▲ More elegant than social networking alternatives, Virb also makes it easy to include media from other sites

editing for making pages quickly and easily, but you also get full access to the underlying styles, which is something MySpace doesn't offer.

Last.fm

DETAILS www.lastfm.com TYPE Online music

Last.fm is a social music website that streams music – without adverts – based on the artists you like. Simply type in the name of your favourite artists and Last.fm will generate a station of similar music.



▲ Last.fm matches its music to your own personal taste

It isn't the only streaming music site, but we've found that Last.fm matches musical preferences better than rivals such as Pandora (www.pandora.com).

You don't need to register, but logging in lets the service build a profile of your listening habits – a feature it calls 'scrobbling'. With this feature, Last.fm notes every track you play on the site or through services such as iTunes, and this affects the songs it plays. You can also help it adjust to your taste as you use it by clicking on the Heart icon if you love a track, or the Ban icon if you never want to hear it again.

There is a social networking element to Last.fm. Once you have listened to enough songs to build up a database, it starts populating your neighbourhood with people who have similar listening tastes, while an Events feature recommends concerts in your area.

Blogger.com

DETAILS www.blogger.com DETAILS Blogging

When starting your own blog, you have two choices. You can wrestle with installing blogging software on your own site. Or you can take the sensible option and use a web-based blogging tool such as Blogger or WordPress (www.wordpress.com).

Blogger, owned by Google, has revolutionised blogging. You can host your blog on Blogger's servers for free. Customising it is easy (see 'Hosting Blogger on your own site' on page 131), and you can embed extras such as advertising or site-tracking software such as Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics).

Blogger isn't perfect – it doesn't make it easy to generate trackbacks to see who is talking about your blog – but if you want to make your voice heard, there is no simpler medium.



▲ Blogger may be free, but it isn't underpowered. You can even host multiple blogs on the site

Google Maps

DETAILS <http://maps.google.co.uk>
TYPE Maps

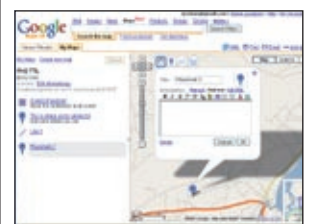
Google Maps was hugely popular when it launched in 2005, and it has emerged as one of the best examples of an interactive web application. Its speedy mapping engine provides multiple ways of viewing map detail. As well as a traditional street map view, Google Maps provides a top-down satellite view and a hybrid mixture of both displays.

But the real reason behind Google's success lies in its navigation. Rather than clicking small buttons to move a map display, Google has adopted the intuitive approach of clicking and dragging the map itself, with the map redrawing as you move it. Google hasn't stopped developing, either. Its most recent addition is the MyMaps feature, which lets you draw lines and polygons on a map, complete with editable tags that can contain text, HTML, video or picture content. Once saved, you can share the URL of these maps with others. It's great for customising directions.

Some users find Google's navigational controls disconcerting, but if you get lost you can return to your last view by clicking on the small icon in the middle of the arrows at the top-left of the map. When you're on a high zoom level, you'll find it easier to navigate using the arrow keys on your keyboard.

Another feature that many users overlook is Google Maps' memory. If you log into Google – you can use the same account you use with Google Mail – Maps remembers all your recent searches. Just click on the Saved Locations link at the top of the page to view them.

Google Maps also provides travel directions. While we prefer the AA's website (www.theaa.com) for accurate itineraries, Google Maps has some nice touches. For instance, when you click on one of the steps of an itinerary, a floating bubble appears showing a close-up view of the relevant area.



▲ With Google Maps you can draw directly on the map and save the results



Blinksale

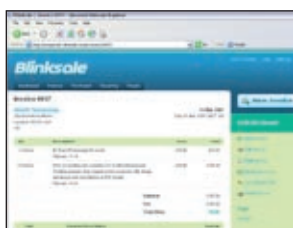
DETAILS www.blinksale.com
TYPE Invoicing application

Blinksale's web-based invoicing takes away the chore of managing your business income. The free version lets you create and send three invoices per month. That's not a lot, but it may be enough if your small business is secondary to your main job.

The program's main window is divided into tabs for categories such as invoices, purchases and people. You enter client details in the People section and create invoices in the Invoices section, selecting your client from a drop-down menu. It lets you email beautifully designed – and configurable – invoices, although traditionalists will be pleased to know that you can also print them out and send them the old-fashioned way. It is also possible to set up automatically recurring invoices.

Blinksale isn't just a glorified invoice generator, though. It's ideal for anyone who has ever wondered whether they really did send that invoice, because it manages your invoices so effectively. For example, when you enter and send an invoice in Blinksale, it is automatically flagged as sent, and you can mark invoices as paid when you receive payment. Blinksale also tracks invoices in a Dashboard view, grouping sent invoices as either open or overdue according to the invoice date and payment status. You even get a neat overview of your billing history – dividing sent invoices into open, past due and recently closed categories. By totalling the balances in each invoice, you can instantly see how much is owed to you.

You can filter your invoices by client and – because you can attach descriptive tags to invoices – by project and subject matter. You can then export these filtered results to an Excel spreadsheet. If an invoice is flagged as overdue in the Dashboard, you can click on it and generate a reminder email.



▲ Create multi-line invoices in Blinksale and track payments on specific invoices

YouSendIt

DETAILS www.yousendit.com TYPE File sending

Have you ever tried to send a hefty email attachment only to see it fail because of size restrictions? If you have, YouSendIt will be a godsend.

As with the best web applications, you don't need to register to use YouSendIt. Simply enter the sender's and recipient's email addresses along with a message, and you can send a file up to 100MB over a secure connection. The recipient gets an email with a link to the web page where they can download the file. Links stay active for a week. Unfortunately, YouSendIt doesn't email the sender a confirmation message when the recipient has downloaded the file.



▲ YouSendIt is a speedy way to transfer large files

Openomy

DETAILS www.openomy.com TYPE Online storage

Openomy's service is simple. It provides free storage for files up to 1GB, which you can then access from any web-connected computer.

Like other web applications, Openomy organises files by tags assigned to files as you upload them, rather than by folder. Abandoning the folder structure can make finding files tricky at first, but after a while its attractions, such as the ability to access files in more than one location, outweigh any drawbacks.

Files are private by default, but you can make them public. This assigns them a permanent link, which enables you to share your files with anyone over the web. It's also handy if you want to access your files from another PC.



▲ Openomy's simple interface provides a new way of looking at your backed-up data, enabling you to sort it with tags rather than folders

Writeboard

DETAILS www.writeboard.com TYPE Collaboration application

One advantage of 37 Signal's Writeboard is that, unlike similar document collaboration tools, you don't have to log on or become a member to use it. Instead, you simply visit the Writeboard website, enter a name for the shared document, along with a password and your email address, and you can begin writing immediately.



▲ Writeboard lets you get to work straight away

If you're wedded to Microsoft Word, you'll find Writeboard's options limited. There isn't even a toolbar. Instead, Writeboard uses simple text-formatting techniques to add styles. For example, items between asterisks are formatted in bold, while to indent a block, you use the '>' character.

When you save a Writeboard document, it is formatted and supplied a URL for direct, password-protected web access. This makes it ideal for collaborative work. While there's no Word-style track changes feature, Writeboard's versioning is arguably better. When someone edits the document, Writeboard stores the changes as separate versions. These versions are selected from a pane on the right of a window, and you can compare two versions by selecting the checkboxes next to their version name.

There are more powerful online document editors, but none is quite as accessible or easy to use.

Remember the milk

DETAILS www.rememberthemilk.com TYPE Task manager

Remember the milk is a to-do list and task manager. You enter tasks to complete on its simple web-based form. The form updates in real time, so when you hit the Return key the task list updates without the need to refresh the entire browser window.

You can select each task and assign it a due date or a priority, or even tag it to make organisation easier. Tasks can be shared with others by email or using SMS on your mobile.

The tool's most essential feature is perhaps its integration with Google Calendar, or any calendaring application that supports the iCalendar file format. As long as the list you create is public, you can subscribe



▲ Remember the milk shows forthcoming tasks in a simple list that can be filtered according to due date

to its 'iCalendar' URL to track its data visually. You can see your public task lists in Google Calendar, which adds a task icon to the top of each day's display. Click on this to review and edit tasks or add new ones.



Desktoptwo

DETAILS <https://desktoptwo.com> TYPE Online desktop

Despite all the benefits that working with online applications can bring, there are still those who would feel more comfortable working with files in the familiar environment of their desktop. Desktoptwo is a Flash-based desktop environment and operating system that is hosted entirely in your web browser. At the moment, it seems to work better with Internet Explorer than Firefox.

Desktoptwo, currently in beta, comes with 1GB of storage, a rudimentary contacts application and even its own Outlook-like email client. This is pre-configured with a Desktoptwo email address, although you can add standard POP email addresses, too. It has an instant messaging application that supports MSN, Google Talk and Jabber. There's also a rudimentary website editor and blogging application, although given the excellent choice of existing web-based blogging tools you probably won't need this.

One problem that any web-based operating system faces is lack of suitability for business use. Desktoptwo has bravely addressed this by linking with



▲ Use an entire operating system from your browser, complete with Java versions of OpenOffice applications

a Java version of OpenOffice (www.openoffice.org). Confusingly, this opens in a new browser window outside the web desktop, but it works well.

Webnote

DETAILS www.aypwp.org/webnote TYPE Note taker

A pencil and a pad of paper is still the quickest and most convenient way to make notes. If you don't mind taking that little bit longer, though, you can use an application such as Webnote to make notes online. This has its advantages, too, as you've always got a backup and you don't have to carry those little written notes everywhere with you.



▲ Make notes, share information with others and receive instant RSS updates of changes with Webnote

Webnote is a group of small, coloured notes that you can type into and drag around the page. To create a note, enter a title on the Webnote home page. If a webnote with that title already exists, it will open for editing. If it doesn't, Webnote will create a new note. You don't need to go through this procedure every time you write a note. To access your note directly, append its title to the site's URL. For example, if we created a note called *Computer Shopper*, we could enter www.aypwp.org/webnote/computershopper.

Webnote understands HTML, so you can even embed hyperlinks and images in a note. However, there are drawbacks to the service. Notes are open to public view – there's no way to password-protect files. That means that anyone can see your notes, but on the plus side it also means collaboration is easy. You just pass the webnote's URL to others. It is also unlikely that you'll put sensitive or private information in the notes. If you are using Webnote for collaboration in this way, subscribe to the webnote's RSS web feed. This will automatically show updates as others add content to the webnote.

Stikkit

DETAILS www.stikkit.com TYPE Note taker

Stikkit is a deceptively simple online application for organising your bookmarks, calendar events, contacts and notes. The 'stikkit' it uses are small yellow windows that look like sticky notes into which you can type directly.

Stikkit is smarter than the average note taker. It tracks what you type, searching for what it calls 'magic words', such as 'at' or 'on' and using these to interpret important details, appointments or contacts, and organising the results automatically. For example, as you type proper names they are turned into contacts – or what stikkit calls 'peeps'. Stikkit also recognises events. If you type "Meet Tom tomorrow at 9.30", not only will it recognise the name, but it will understand the term 'tomorrow' and the time. It will automatically generate a calendar event based on that information, and you can subscribe to stikkit calendars in Google Calendar or any other calendaring application that uses the iCalendar format. If you find all this



▲ Stikkit can analyse your notes for important times and dates to add to your calendar automatically

infuriating rather than clever, you can stop Stikkit interpreting a paragraph by typing an exclamation mark at the start.

Mozy

DETAILS <http://mozy.com>
TYPE Online backup

Many of us back up our data using the handiest means possible, such as a CD, an attached drive or a separate partition on our PC. But that's not much good if both drives are simultaneously lost to fire, flood or theft, or we've stored the CD in the same location as the PC and it has been damaged, too.

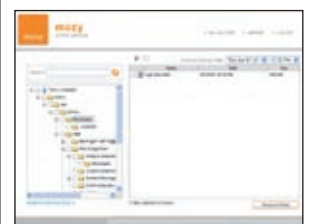
Mozy is one answer. It's a recovery tool that not only automates backups, but also allows you to restore files on any PC using a web browser, irrespective of your location.

Mozy isn't entirely web-based. It has two parts: a simple backup tool that you install on your PC, and a web-based recovery tool.

In the backup application, you choose the files and folders to back up. Mozy then slowly – and we mean slowly; it can take days with multi-megabyte files – copies them to its online database. After the first backup, it's much faster, as Mozy backs up only files that have changed since the last backup. You can schedule automatic backups whenever your PC has been idle for a set period, or a daily backup at a time you choose.

Mozy's real value lies in its website, where you can see when you last backed-up your data and how much of your allocation you have used. Clicking the Restore Files link lets you grab all or part of your backed up data, and you can select any previous version from a drop-down menu. Data is encrypted with 128-bit SSL encryption during backup and 448-bit encryption while stored.

Mozy provides 2GB of free backup. Other providers, such as iBackup and xdrive, offer 5GB. However, Mozy also supports versioning, which the other two backup providers don't. With versioning, you can restore an earlier version of a file from before your last backup. If you decide on for the paid-for service you get unlimited backup, which again, neither of its two rivals offers.



▲ Protect your data by keeping it out of harm's way on the internet



The AA.com

DETAILS www.theaa.com
TYPE Route finder

This website may be overloaded with attempts to sell you breakdown cover and travel insurance, but perseverance is well rewarded. Buried away at the bottom-right of the home page is the site's excellent route planner for UK travel directions.

For a useful and easy-to-understand journey itinerary, enter your starting point and destination into the search fields. You can also enter postcodes.

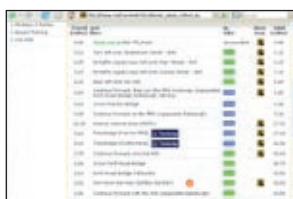
Then opt for either a simple text-based route plan or a map-based one. Don't expect too much of the mapping function. Google Maps has the edge here as, at its smallest scale, the AA's version looks as if it was drawn by a five-year-old and coloured in by their younger sibling. The AA's text-based instructions are far clearer. Every stage includes a hyperlink to a local map.

The range of configuration options is excellent. You can add multiple way points, opt to avoid motorways, toll roads and congestion charges and even flag renowned traffic blackspots along the route. You even have the option of highlighting speed cameras.

More importantly, the route plan can also display the location of petrol stations, along with a link to the petrol supplier. Use this information in conjunction with the data from another website, www.petrolprices.com, which shows the cheapest petrol in a given area. Armed with this information, you can not only make sure you reach your destination in good time, but spend less money getting there.

The service isn't limited to the UK. You can also plan routes in Ireland and the rest of Europe, although the map-based option isn't available here.

The site includes a host of other useful information. One click away are lists of places to stay, and, most helpfully, AA Roadwatch. Just enter the location of any travel blackspots into this field and you get live, up-to-date traffic reports.



▲ Simple route itineraries with links to maps – that's the secret of theaa.com's approach

Picnik

DETAILS www.picnik.com TYPE Photo editor

Currently in beta, Picnik is a Flash-based photo editor that runs in your web browser. Aside from being a great way to edit photos quickly without having to launch a dedicated photo editor, Picnik has other advantages. You can connect directly to your Flickr account, edit your images and save them back to Flickr without opening that service. Picnik can also open images from other photo-capable services such as Picasa Web Albums, or from any website. Just enter the image's URL. If you don't have a Flickr account, you have to save images to your hard disk, but Picnik will soon allow users to save images to its site.

A tabbed toolbar at the top of the browser window splits the program's functions into tools that apply basic effects, such as vignettes and colour



▲ Picnik is ideal for editing images in Flickr

enhancements, and those that correct flaws such as red-eye and over exposure. It also has cropping tools and an unsharp mask function. There's even a full-screen mode that makes you feel as if you're working in a desktop-based application.

Flickr

DETAILS www.flickr.com TYPE Online photo sharing

Flickr is well established as the king of photo-sharing websites. There are several alternatives on the internet, such as Google's Picasa Web Albums (picasaweb.google.com) and ipernity (<http://ipernity.com/>), which also handles video and music sharing. But what currently sets Flickr apart from rivals is its sheer scale.



▲ Sheer scale makes Flickr the best photo-sharing site

Flickr makes it easy to share photos with your friends or the entire world. When you upload pictures you can tag them to make it easier for people to find images that match those tags. You can also group them into photo albums and view them as slideshows. A strong interactive element adds to Flickr's appeal. Viewers can add comments and notes to your photos.

While Flickr provides desktop-based uploading tools, upload and organising features are also available on the website. One reason Flickr has become so big is its open-development framework. This makes it easy for other web applications, such as Picnik or Virb, to access the site, and users can view Flickr images on those sites.

You can use Flickr for free with some restrictions. While the free version still provides a generous 100MB limit on uploads, only smaller, resized images can be viewed. The original, larger images are still stored on Flickr, and if you upgrade your account, you'll get access to the full version.

LogMeIn

DETAILS www.logmein.com TYPE Remote access service

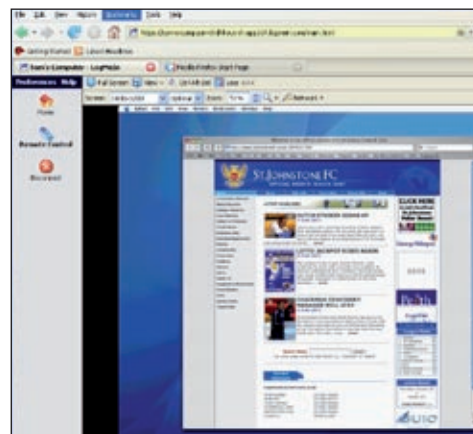
LogMeIn lets you link to an internet-connected PC, see its desktop and control everything on it – all from a standard web browser on a PC or handheld device.

Anyone who has regularly suffered the crushing despair of trying to connect to a PC remotely through multiple firewalls will find LogMeIn a godsend. You don't need to poke holes in firewall settings to connect to your remote PCs. LogMeIn says its services are compatible with all known routers and firewalls.

All you need to do is download and install a small piece of software on the PC or Mac you plan to control. As long as that machine is running and connected to the internet, you can access it remotely through the LogMeIn website. For added security you enter two different passwords to connect to it: your registered password when you enter the site, and a specific computer access code for the computer you plan to control. You will see your remote PC's desktop in your browser and you can use its applications, files and email as if you were sitting at the machine. There's no need to be encumbered by the browser window, either. Click a button on the page and LogMeIn switches to full-screen mode.

The connection is encrypted, but while LogMeIn never feels anything like as responsive as sitting right in front of the remote PC, it's usable even over a modest broadband connection.

LogMeIn isn't the only web-based remote access software. Citrix's GoToMy PC offers similar features, but charges nearly £100 a year for access to a single PC. LogMeIn doesn't charge for connecting to a single computer. A Pro version, which costs around £35 a year, lets you do the fancy stuff, such as transferring files between host and remote PCs, inviting guests to connect to your PC and printing remote files locally.



▲ With LogMeIn you can control other computers from a remote location quickly and easily



Xe.com

DETAILS www.xe.com TYPE Currency converter

One of the oldest web applications, Xe.com bills itself as the world's favourite currency conversion website. Its accuracy is certainly hard to fault. The site displays live mid-market prices for major currencies on its home page. Prices are automatically updated every minute.

Xe.com is clearly aimed at people who trade in currencies for a living. However, even those who only want to find out if they are getting a good deal on their holiday money will find it useful. Simply enter the amount you want to convert and select the currencies to convert between. Bookmarking the result creates a handy short cut for future conversions between those two currencies.



▲ Whether you're chancing your arm on the currency market or you just want to know how much spending money you'll be taking on holiday this year, visit Xe.com

Greenwich Mean Time

DETAILS www.greenwichmeantime.com TYPE Time utility

The Greenwich Mean Time website lets you find out the local time anywhere in the world. In a couple of clicks you can get the accurate time in any one of dozens of countries. The time is synchronised with an internet time server every five minutes.

The site is often used by people who want to call abroad, but need to check that it's a reasonable hour. To help them, the website lists the international dialling code for the relevant country under the correct time. Greenwich Mean Time even goes into a brief explanation of the various time zones and when they change seasonally.



▲ Greenwich Mean Time is invaluable if you make a lot of phone calls to different countries

Ask Oxford

DETAILS www.askoxford.com TYPE Dictionary

Ask Oxford is a fantastic free dictionary reference tool. It allows you to search the entire contents of the 145,000-entry Compact Oxford Dictionary, one of the foremost language resources in the world.

This website isn't just a dry point of reference, though. It provides a host of other goodies, such as the intriguing 'word of the day' feature, which will help you bolster your vocabulary with a host of unusual words. But arguably its most illuminating feature is its 'Ask the Expert' section. This answers with equal aplomb common grammatical queries and unreserved trivia, such as an explanation of whether a banana is a fruit or a herb (the answer is both).

The site also includes sound advice on improving your writing style, as well as word games such as crosswords that you can fill in online, and a ludicrously addictive version of Hangman.

In your own words Hosting Blogger on your own site

Blogger (www.blogger.com) is an undeniably easy way to start blogging. You can use the standard 'blogspot.com' URL if you just want to run a blog. Alternatively, you can integrate Blogger into your own site and use your chosen domain name instead of blogspot.

To add the blog to your site, log in to Blogger and click on the Settings button. Under the Publishing tab, enter your site's address in the first field; for example, 'yoursite.co.uk'. Under this, type in the address your visitors will use to link to your blog; for example, 'http://yoursite.co.uk/blog'.

You'll also need to enter the FTP path – the web-accessible directory where Blogger places blog files on your server. This often begins in the format 'htdocs' or 'public_html'. If you're in doubt, your ISP can advise you. Enter the blog's home page (it's a good idea to use the default 'index.html' as long as its name doesn't conflict with that of another file in the same directory). Then

enter the same FTP username and password you use to upload files to your site.

While the blog is now part of your site, it probably bears no visual similarity to it. If your site already uses cascading style sheets (CSS) to format its content, you should be able to tweak Blogger's design to match the rest of your site's pages.

To edit Blogger's content, click on the Template tab or the Template link on your Blogger home page. Click on the Edit HTML tab to see your blog's layout in an editable template window. It's easier to edit this externally, so copy the template's text to a text editor, such as Notepad. Save a copy of the original template first so that you can go back to it if things go awry. Blogger's CSS usually appears between the <style> and </style> tags.

You can either tweak Blogger's CSS settings manually or apply your site's existing style sheets to the template by adding the line:

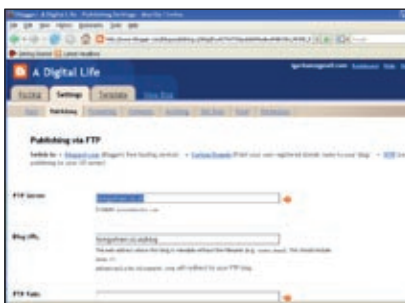
```
<STYLE TYPE="text/css">@import url("styles.css")
```

between the <HEAD></HEAD> tags of the template, where "styles.css" is the path to your site's existing CSS.

There are two caveats. First, the Blogger template uses specific CSS styles for elements that are unlikely to be in your original style sheet, such as 'blog-header'. Second, if styles clash, those embedded in the template have priority. This means you'll probably need to do a bit of tweaking. To test for this, save the file to your desktop with an HTML extension and open it in your browser.

Near the bottom of the template you'll find the page's HTML content. Here you can enter hyperlinks to other pages on your site. It's best to use the Sidebar area for this.

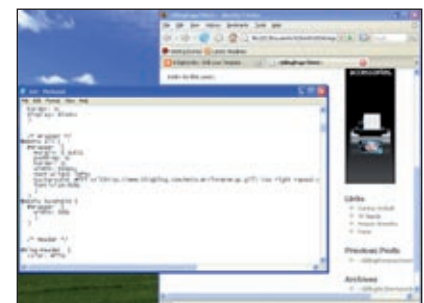
Once you've added your extra HTML, cut and paste the template back into Blogger's template window. ☑



▲ Transfer your Blogger blog to your own website by entering your FTP details in the relevant fields



▲ Cut and paste the template text into Blogger's template window to edit in your own text editor, but remember to save a copy



▲ Get a preview of the way your new blog will look by opening your edited text file in a web browser